

**ROBERT MERTENS'S PROPOSALS REGARDING THE SPECIFIC NAMES
"BOIGA" LACÉPÈDE, 1789, AND "PICTUS" GMELIN, [1789], BOTH
PUBLISHED IN COMBINATION WITH THE GENERIC NAME
"COLUBER" (CLASS REPTILIA)**

(a) Comment by **JAY M. SAVAGE**

(University of Southern California, Los Angeles)

(Commission Reference : Z.N.(S.) 772)

(For the proposal in this case see *Bull. zool. Nomencl.* 12 : 275—276)

(Letter dated 9th September 1956)

The two names in question both apply to the same species of Asian snake and Schmidt (1927) as the first reviser selected *boiga* over *pictus*. This selection, although not recognized under the Copenhagen decisions, must be retroactively changed if Mertens's proposal is accepted and his arguments do not seem to warrant such a change. In particular Dr. Mertens's statement that this snake is most generally known as *pictus* is questionable. Since Schmidt's publication the animal in question has been mentioned under the names *boiga*, *pictus*, and *ahaetulla*, most commonly under the last mentioned name. The name *pictus* was widely used for this species previous to 1927, although even then some authors favored *ahaetulla*. If frequency of usage is Dr. Mertens's only argument for using *pictus*, I must emphatically recommend the selection of *Coluber boiga* Lacépède, 1789, over *Coluber pictus* Gmelin, [1789]. This recommendation is in line with the proposal submitted to the Commission by Savage and Oliver (1956, *Bull. zool. Nomencl.* 12 : 147—152).

(b) Rejoinder to comment submitted by Jay M. Savage

By **ROBERT MERTENS**

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(Letter dated 29th September 1956)

The specific name *pictus* for the snake coming into question in connection with the genus *Dendrelaphis* had before 1927 been by far the most usual name as it can be seen in the (partly monographic) papers of Boulenger, de Rooij, Wall, Werner, Barbour, etc. Only by the mistaken introduction of the specific name of *boiga* in the year 1927 did the denomination for this snake become uncertain. Nevertheless, even since 1927 the specific name *pictus* is to be found very frequently in the literature up to most recent times; for example, in the synopsis of the COLUBRIDAE by Werner (1930); in the taxonomically very essential papers on the genus of *Dendrelaphis* (or *Dendrophis*) by Meise & Hennig (1932, 1935) and by Mertens (1934); in all the papers by Bourret, Brongersma and Kopstein; in the very important "Checklist of the Snakes of the Indo-Australian Archipelago" by de Haas (1950); in the biometrical study of Bergmann (1955), etc. On the other hand the specific name *boiga* appears in only a few papers since 1927. In the literature of most recent times (since about 1943, when Malcolm Smith replaced *pictus* by *ahaetulla*) it is hardly found except in a paper of Savage (1952). For this reason I plead emphatically for a vote in favour of the specific name *pictus* (and not of *boiga*) for this very well known viper which is to be found so frequently in South-East Asia and in the Sunda-Archipelago.